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# **The Religious Transformation of Politics and the Political Transformation of Religion**

**Kenneth W. Thompson**

This article deals with the introduction of strongly fundamental views into the theory and practice of politics. It also concerns the transformation of religion from a concern with religious faith to the creation of political religions. Thus forces have been at work in the past two decades seeking to make a religion of politics and transforming religion into a holy political crusade in the form of a particular version of partisan politics.

The *Review of Politics* on its 50th Anniversary provides an appropriate setting for a discussion of religion and politics. The subject has been a central focus for the journal since its earliest beginnings. As preface to what some will recognize as a Niebuhrian formulation of the problem of religion and politics, let me trace some of the reasons for the journal's place at the table in discussions of such topics.

First, the University of Notre Dame is unique in providing a home for free and open inquiry into religion and politics. That freedom and openness is a tribute to those who helped establish and maintain a framework for discourse. This achievement was not preordained. The discourse might easily have become separatist and partisan. I spent my childhood through the first year in college in Central Wisconsin in a Mississippi River town. Students, alumni and athletes from the Catholic and public high schools—Aquinas and Central—met in pitched battle on downtown streets following every athletic competition and God pity the Catholic or Protestant student whom the opposition cornered alone. In the prewar Midwest, we knew the meaning of Holy War and to this day some bear the scars. Central Wisconsin was a prime recruiting ground for the University of Notre Dame. As colleges and universities tend to do, the university could easily have taken on the religious and political complexion of Midwest communities like LaCrosse. Some Catholics and Protestants saw themselves as Christian Rambos in those days. However, university leadership, and notably Father Hesburgh, taught mutual understanding and created a universe of openness and trust. The achievement of religious freedom at Notre Dame may be Hesburgh's finest hour and his successor, Father Malloy, has said, "Notre

Dame is an open forum where diverse viewpoints can be freely and critically discussed."

Second, the university, as often happens with religious institutions, could easily have become narrowly sectarian and confessional, shutting out the rest of the world. It could have become an island of purity in a sinful world. As a rank outsider, I have the sense that two factors combined to prevent this from happening. First, little clusters of intellectual and scholarly life sprang up at Notre Dame that brought together persons of broad vision. In my experience, the *Review of Politics* and the Committee on International Relations are shining examples, but they were not alone. The other factor was the presence of some remarkable individuals. Certainly, the first editor of *The Review* was a remarkable among remarkables. Thomas J. Stritch is right that Waldemar Gurian knew and was known by European thinkers like Maritain and Voegelin but his intellectual curiosity and outreach was broader than "the influentials." Whether he was on the road in Paris or Chicago, he could not control his insatiable appetite for new faces and fresh insights, especially in international relations and political thought. (Gurian was the quintessential ivory hunter with his eye on human talent.)

Men like Gurian, Stephen Kertesz, Bob Fitzsimons and later Stritch helped shape the early dialogue on religion and politics at Notre Dame, especially in *The Review*, shielding it at once from dogmatism and every form of narrow-mindedness. (The story of Gurian's role in the publication of *The Catholic Church in World Affairs* and the inclusion of Father Murray's chapter despite the withdrawal of the church's imprimatur is a strikingly graphic example). They welcomed non-Catholics and fledgling intellectual figures who only later were recognized elsewhere. They helped provide a friendly atmosphere for new writings and work. Gurian's friends knew that and often compared him with editors like Norman Podhoretz who would publish writers like Morgenthau and Arendt only when they redrafted their essays to conform with his views. An odd trio joined in traveling together from New York to Gurian's funeral: Hannah Arendt, Hans Morgenthau and myself. We told stories about his integrity as an editor and compared him with others. *The Review* gave not only religious but political freedom to its editors and its authors.

Third, the pages of *The Review* are an ongoing story of devotion to both continuity and change, tradition and innovation and a philosophical and historical approach more recently blended with

an interest in major topics in constitutional law. Even those who are closest to *The Review* have difficulty explaining how it has managed to respect such opposites as continuity and change or any of the other pairings. Journals, like churches or university departments, are fair game for year-round interest groups seeking domination. The narrower the group, the more determined its quest for domination. Individuals and groups engage in a struggle for influence and power within journals no less than within professional societies. Some pressure groups move from journal to journal, professional society to society. *The Review* may suffer in subscription ratings for not being the mouthpiece of an intellectual or political movement, a professional society or a militant church, but its losses are far outweighed by lasting benefits that include *freedom to* follow the truth wherever it leads and *freedom from* the constraints resulting from a religious or political straightjacket. By way of preface, then, my proposition is that *The Review* remains a journal in which ideas can be put forward and tested, even on a subject as divisive as religion and politics. Allow me to test that proposition.

#### THE RELIGIOUS TRANSFORMATION OF POLITICS

From its Founding, the American republic has provided a proving ground for the relating of religion to politics. It is surely the case that religion was present in the minds of those who drafted the Constitution. It is no less true that certain Founding Fathers never stopped urging the separation of church and state. The concept of separation as checks and balances permeates American constitutionalism. A century and a half later, Justice Brandeis was to write:

The doctrine of the separation of powers was adopted by the Convention of 1787 not to promote efficiency but to preclude the arbitrary exercise of power — not to avoid friction but by means of the inevitable friction incident to the distribution of governmental powers among these departments to save the people from autocracy.<sup>1</sup>

In New England and Virginia, not only secular thinkers but religious leaders were attuned to the problem. Society is indebted to Calvinist theologians such as John Cotton who warned: "Let all the world give mortall man no greater power than they are content they shall use for use it they will." The "great blasphemies" of which such men might be guilty lead jurists and theologians to warn against abuse of power by both political and religious leaders. Even a staunch

Enlightenment figure such as Thomas Jefferson could write in the last article of the Kentucky Resolutions of 1798: "Confidence in the men of our choice . . . is . . . the parent of despotism: free government is founded in jealousy and not in confidence; it is jealousy and not confidence which prescribes limited constitutions to bind down those whom we are obliged to trust with power. . . . In questions of power then let no more be heard of confidence in man, but bind him down from mischief by the claims of the Constitution."

Yet historians point to another side of Jefferson's political thinking formed by the Enlightenment and by a Deist faith which in turn was shaped in part by the rationalism of the French Enlightenment. For Jefferson, the American experiment clearly represented "a new beginning." The colonists had shaken the dust of Europe from their feet. They boasted that the thirteen colonies knew nothing of European feudalism and tyranny or divisions of class and ethnic groups. The American Zion was "a City on a Hill," beckoning to all mankind to follow. Nearly a century later, Lincoln was to speak of "something in that Declaration giving liberty, not alone to the people of this country but hope to the world for all future time."<sup>2</sup> The common people of America had reached a high ground that Europeans had not attained in a thousand years given their division into rich and poor, wolves and sheep. "Here are not aristocratical families, no courts, no kings, no bishops, no ecclesiastical dominion," wrote Crèvecoeur. "We have no princes for whom we toil, starve and bleed; we are the most perfect society now existing in the world."<sup>3</sup> The idea of perfectibility was always present in the American political experience.

Moreover, God was not absent from this picture. If Calvinists and Deists were divided on certain religious truths, they were united in faith that the new nation was an "American Israel." Religiously, "the influentials" displayed the marks of utopianism. The same was not true politically. Neither the Calvinism of New England nor the Deism of Virginia held out much hope for the religious transformation of politics. Calvinists took a pessimistic view of human nature. Man was burdened down by Original Sin and the society's political task was to provide for political arrangements that held evil in check and channeled virtue toward good social ends. It is true that Puritanism left room for election day sermons but such appeals in churches on the eve of balloting were timed to coincide with the closing days in the electoral process. It is true that some forms of the religion of New England went far toward affirming the title

that Edward Johnson gave his book in 1650, *Wonder Working Providence of Zion's Saviour*. But the emphasis was primarily on religious purity and Johnson proclaimed that "Jesus Christ had manifested his kingly office toward his churches more fully than ever the sons of men saw." The individual and his church might be transformed in the New World but not all of politics as such.

For Jefferson and the Deists, transformation would come about, if ever, through the intervention of reason and the interplay of a natural harmony of interests. It was reason and the American experience that possessed a transforming power, not religion. The frontier and a preference for rural life were more likely to foster the ideal community. Jeffersonian reform was a goal to be sought through the broadening of political and economic opportunity, not something that had deep religious roots. For Jefferson, education was the road to a new and better life. Progress was inherent in human nature and would neither be produced nor obstructed by "nature's God." Even present-day heirs of Jefferson who are Christians such as Dean Rusk quote an ancient dictum: "work as though everything is up to you, know that everything depends on God." The search for the balance between individual responsibility and God's transforming influence is endless in human history.

In the late 1970's and 1980's, we have witnessed a change in these historical and philosophical perspectives. In the 1950's and 1960's, a school of thought that many called Christian realism was dominant, especially among Protestant thinkers. (Throughout, I have drawn my examples from a form of Protestant experience with which I am familiar.) Its influence was mediated through teachers of the era's political leaders and reformers. Christian realism provided a background and an intellectual framework for the political actors of the time. It never pretended to provide the answers in specific policies or concrete policy choices and in the 1970's even some of its adherents departed from it for this reason. Realism was not activist enough. Those who were caught up in the prevailing mood of social criticism and counterculture were found lacking in almost every form of historic realism and idealism. By the mid- and late-1970's, however, Christian realism had a resurgence.

Throughout the 1950's and especially the first three-quarters of the 1960's, the influence on politics of Christian realism, while significant, was almost always indirect rather than direct. Historically, this has been true of most religious and intellectual movements. Realism like other philosophical approaches has never claimed to

offer copybook answers for politicians. More than movements that preceded and others which followed, Christian realism remembered Christ's words: "My Kingdom is not of this world." Reinhold Niebuhr, Herbert Butterfield and the historian Arnold J. Toynbee recognized the differences between the vocation of the theologian or historian and the vocation of politics.

The 1950's and 1960's witnessed mounting awareness of civil rights in the forefront of the nation's unfinished business. The preeminent civil rights leader was Martin Luther King. As was true of other civil rights leaders, King's teacher was Spellman College President Benjamin Mays, one of America's greatest educators. It was Dr. Mays who spoke in the language of Christian realism pressing home the goals of the civil rights movement but with a keen understanding of the alliances that were essential and the obstacles which had to be overcome. May's realism frustrated militants such as Dr. Vincent Harding who imagined that the movement could realize its full program and do so immediately. I recall visiting Atlanta University and Spellman College in the 1960's when the militants had locked Dr. Mays in his office as a protest against his more pragmatic approach. Not long afterward, a political leader who had been for many years the symbol of American liberalism, Hubert Humphrey, received lukewarm support from liberal groups in his 1968 race for the presidency. Julian Hartt and Charles Garretson have shown that Humphrey's mentor, insofar as the former vice president did any systematic thinking on religion and politics, was Reinhold Niebuhr. The ideas of Christian realism then were transmitted by great teachers to political figures who reformulated these ideas in their own ways.

The central thesis of Christian realism was that the relation between religion and politics in the United States rested not on their being identical but on mutual strengths and reinforcing qualities. The health of the relationship was threatened when either sought to absorb and overwhelm the other. Religion lived in the realm of moral absolutes and ultimate truth. It provided an overarching spiritual environment for society. It represented a higher order of lasting truths about God and man that fallible humans only dimly perceived. Lincoln had described Providence's scroll unfolding toward an indeterminate end that no human being could fathom but which was a reality nonetheless. Some aspects of spiritual truth remained forever in the higher order of a *mysterium tremendum* where they constituted objective truth. To the extent men caught a glimpse

of such truths, they did so as shadows on the wall of a cave or through revelation as understood by theologians. Religion was the order of higher truth.

Politics, by contrast, was the realm of proximate truth. The vocation of politics demands willingness to accept compromise and adjustment. Lincoln was a sad man, John F. Kennedy once remarked, because he learned that in politics no one can have everything he wants. Politics means living with half a loaf. It seldom if ever is a matter of all or nothing. The political process breaks down when one or both sides call for total moral victory without appreciation of what the other's identity and self-preservation demands. The breakdown becomes inevitable when political valuations are made in the name of absolute right and wrong, as was the case in the Civil War. It might have been possible for the North and the South to compromise on questions of relative political influence in the new states or on the need for a particular organization of the economy. Questions of power or efficiency are measured by the yardstick of more or less. Once the issue becomes the righteousness of a cause or God's will expressed in a given political arrangement, there is no escape from the impending conflict. Compromise and give-and-take become impossible when either side sees its own cause as wholly righteous and the other's as altogether evil. In rough terms, this occurred in "the war between the states." Politics came to an end and a holy war took its place.

Christian realists warned in the 1950's and 1960's of the fateful tendency of religious men and women to invest their own political ends with religious or quasi-religious sanctity. It is true that life is raised above the level of brute existence by the higher ends mankind pursues, even when men fail to reach the heights. Religion assures a sense of the holy and the sacred in life that for an individual can bring transforming power. However, when every proximate political goal from electoral reform to a host of single interest group policies — such as pro- and antigun control or prayer in the schools — are sanctified, prospects for a working democracy are weakened if not destroyed. At its best, religion can work a profound civilizing influence on politics but Christian realists are too sensitive to history and too understanding of the nature of man to imagine that religion can transform the political process. One of them warned: "Christians ought to be a little shy of identifying their faith with particular parties and policies . . . especially as in the realm of politics and public affairs, so many things depend on inferences from



complicated sets of political data.”<sup>4</sup> What religionists neglect to measure are the consequences of one course of policy against another or, as Butterfield put it, “stretching the elastic too far, or producing unpleasant results in some different realm which one had forgotten to take into account.”<sup>5</sup> Saints by their nature are not very good at political calculation. “Real statesmanship . . . requires the ability to hold in one’s mind a whole jungle of relevant details, a whole forest of complicating inconsistencies.”<sup>6</sup>

By the late 1960’s two social and political movements were beginning to challenge Christian realism. Viewed in the light of intellectual history, it is ironic that these two constituted major challenges. From the standpoint of coherent thought, other movements, for example, Catholic just war theory, were more worthy of critical thought and popular response.

The first challenge had roots in the counterculture movement and the youth revolution. It was a response more to events than ideas: Vietnam, Watergate and the assumed passivity of citizens, intellectuals and “the establishment.” In one sense, the revolt of young people against society was an event waiting to happen. The consensus on which postwar American foreign policy had been based was in part political, involving the cooperation of Truman Democrats and Vandenberg Republicans, and in part intellectual, involving the approach of a generation of “wisemen” schooled in the harsh realities of war. When following Vietnam events soured for these leaders and their followers, as was inevitable given the intractability of human affairs, countervailing political movements were bound to arise. Critics were waiting in the wings for postwar leaders to stumble.

The intellectual revolt, while largely secular and sometimes antireligious, challenged Christian realism and every other form of prudential outlook that demonstrated some respect for the political process. Realism in all its forms was not sufficiently activist. Its stress on ambiguity and complexity obscured the need for far-reaching changes in society. While acknowledging the possibility of giving the system one more chance, leaders in the movement, whose outlook reflected a curious blend of utopianism and mild anarchism, mobilized followers bent on transforming politics. To the extent the movement was based more on blind faith than political reason — “make love not war” — it took upon itself the marks of a quasi religion. In the reformers’ minds, not only politics but the flawed society of their parents’ and grandparents’ generations had to be

transformed. Because the numerical strength of the movement was substantial and its comprehensive make-up all-inclusive, including the faithful's music, dress and overall lifestyle, the revolt, however short-lived, had far-reaching effects. For segments of the population, the youth revolution led to the transformation of politics, in ways quite unforeseen, including the enfeeblement of one of the two major political parties.

If the first challenge to the existing political system calling for the transformation of politics was only quasi-religious, the second was an explicit religious movement. While the first represented a challenge from the left, the second came from the far right. What the two shared in common was a commitment to a radical reorientation of politics. Each assumed that politics would be different if leadership were to pass to more young people on the left or more older people on the Christian right. One spoke in the language of reform or withdrawal, the other in the language of more long-range transformation, not of politics as such but of the legislating of certain social programs. Both movements put stress on using the blunt instruments of coercion in politics as distinguished from consensus building. Neither showed much tolerance for the politics of inclusion. Their most conspicuous lack, when compared with Christian realism or Catholic just war theory, was the absence of preminent theorists or intellectual spokesmen. It is as though American constitutional thought had rested exclusively on the ideas of Thomas Paine or Patrick Henry, the provocateurs, rather than James Madison or Thomas Jefferson, the builders. Both countermovements involved the politics of political protest rather than the politics of political theory or governance. Whereas Christian realism can point to Reinhold Niebuhr and Herbert Butterfield and Catholic just war theory to John Courtney Murray, historians continue to ask who were the intellectual leaders of the two movements and who gained some measure of respect? Who bequeathed a legacy in political thought to thinking men and women in society at large?

Not surprisingly, neither movement brought about a lasting political transformation. The successors of the protesters on the left are the yuppies, hardly a transforming force in American politics. On the right, the enduring contribution is more modest still. Even the most conservative postwar American president has shown little willingness to commit his political capital to the enactment of radical social programs of the religious right. Given the media visibility of the movement, it is instructive how few of their programs

have been enacted into law. If one compares the legislative results of, say, the New Deal of Franklin D. Roosevelt with the enactments of the Moral Majority, the differences are stunning. Beyond comparisons measured by laws and policies enacted, the more important conclusion has to do with political transformation. If the goal of the two, the religious and quasi-religious movements, was to transform politics and the political system, purging it of such certain undesirable features and restoring lost values, the evidence of results is virtually nonexistent. There are residual signs of both movements in 1988 and some of their considerations are traceable in current political contests and conventions. But the ongoing political struggles are taking place in a political setting not fundamentally different from that of the 1950's and the first three-quarters of the 1960's in which traditional politics prevails.

#### THE POLITICAL TRANSFORMATION OF RELIGION

If the absence of the promised religious transformation of politics in the past decade confirms the judgment of the Christian realists, the results of efforts seeking the political transformation of religion supports the realist viewpoint even more. Serious writers have cautioned about the transformation of religion. Butterfield's thoughts are an expression of Christian realism: "Clearly, the political notions and policies that we adopt as Christians, are liable to be entangled (without our ever realizing it) in our patriotic fervor, or our vested interests—all this mixed together with no end of wishful thinking."<sup>7</sup>

Two competing views of religion shape the conclusions that historians reach about the political transformation of religion. The one perspective conceives of religion as an end in itself, the other as a means to certain mundane ends which religion is seen as capable of serving. On this issue, Christian realists group themselves together in one school of thought, however they may differ on decisions in practical politics, while the quasi-religious and religious movements discussed above are part of an outlook which views religion largely in utilitarian terms. Reinhold Niebuhr was especially critical of those Christians who were forever "lobbying for special favors in the court of the Almighty." Butterfield was even more caustic in writing that "it isn't the function of religion or the church to solve the problems of diplomacy or to tell governments how to balance their budgets."<sup>8</sup> The uniqueness of the church is found in its affirming

a spiritual dimension at the core of life and nurturing a deepening of man's inner life.

Having recognized what sets religion apart, the realists emphasize the immensity of the terrestrial consequences of religion, most being unanticipated and even unintended. The Protestant Reformation, for example, was more instrumental than many Protestants acknowledge in the rise of the all-powerful sovereign nation state. Butterfield pointed to an analogy between science and religion quoting Lord Rutherford who after the success of his experiments declared: "Thank God. They will be of no utility to anyone." If he were to return to this life, Rutherford would confront the shattering results of his labors—nuclear physics, threatening the survival of the world. The monastic movement devoted itself to prayer and meditation but became as well the intermediary for transmitting to a semibarbaric world the civilizations of Greece and Rome which might otherwise have disappeared. Looking back, economic historians trace the growth of the wool trade to the English monasteries. It was John Wesley and the lay preachers beginning in the eighteenth century, who planted seeds of respect for each individual human being, precious in God's sight however downtrodden, who were to be the forerunners of the later trade union leaders. And the precursors of modern international law, who were basically monks, argued that even the illiterate and pagan Indians in South America, who were objects of Spanish conquests, had certain rights because they were the children of God's creation. Butterfield once noted that friends were forever telling him that a man could not be a true Christian unless he were a socialist or unless he were a conservative. To this he responded: "Too often, people are waiting to subordinate their religion to some mundane course or other. They don't quite realize how significant Christianity appears to us when we see in every age where its own principles have taken men."<sup>9</sup>

The contrast could not be greater between this view and the outlook of those who call for the political transformation of religion. Many who call for such transformation have their own hidden political agenda. They seek to impose on religion in general and Christianity in particular their own particular brand of religion, in recent years the religion of the Christian right.

There is special irony in all this because of the present state of religion in America. We live in a society marked, as never before, by religious pluralism. Social scientists count the so-called religions in the thousands. This is the reality. Yet we are exposed to an un-

ending stream of religious discourse that equates family and virtue, religious and political salvation with but one form of one particular Protestant denomination. *New York Times* religion columnist Kenneth A. Briggs writes: "Fundamentalists and their somewhat more moderate evangelical brethren believe that moral degeneracy and court decisions, especially those against school prayer and Bible reading and in support of abortion, have undercut America's divinely sanctioned mission."<sup>10</sup> Another commentator suggested that fundamentalists were acting as though they were "a state religion."

Christian realism embraces a view of religion and politics that could not be more different from present-day fundamentalism. The realists maintain that the world of politics and the world of religion are not the same world, a view that orthodox Christianity has always held. The two cannot be merged into a single union; their values never completely overlap. The ultimate end of religion is a purpose beyond all human purposes, while the ends of politics are most often power as a means to order and justice. Politicians seek to harmonize interests and adjust differences; they are the bargainers and horse traders. Their particular temptation is to emphasize means over ends and to place success over virtue. Some religious leaders suffer from the opposite excess. They tend to become moralists who are forever preening themselves over the righteousness of their cause but in the process help struggling humanity very little in coping with a harsh world. They have little sense of that virtue which is the hallmark of statesmanship, prudence. It is virtue, in the form of political wisdom, that brings together the politically possible and the morally right and labors to apply ethical principles within the circumstances of competing interests and diverse aims.

Columnist Doug Bandow has written: "The spectacle of clerics using the Gospel to promote their ideological preferences is not pretty. Thus centuries ago those who desired to freely worship God crossed an ocean to found what became a new nation; today those who claim to follow God drag him into disputes over gambling."<sup>11</sup> At one level, the struggle is being waged within religious bodies themselves. Denominations in which opposing trends have long coexisted find themselves locked in self-described holy wars. Fundamentalists and theological moderates face one another across a deep spiritual chasm, as in the Southern Baptist Convention. One religious writer quotes Baptist moderates as saying that "fundamentalism is not so much a doctrinal position as it is a style of life that is negative, judgmental and suspicious of anyone who doesn't agree with the way they see

things." One moderate seminary president goes further and speaks of "unholy forces . . . at work in our midst" and "campus subversives" recruited and indoctrinated by the fundamentalists. Conservative leaders revel in their political gains and predict a takeover of all the church's institutions in less than ten years. Defending themselves, the moderates are shifting to a year-round strategy, as contrasted with an annual convention, to counter the fundamentalists.

Where is all this leading? For some, religion and politics appear to be merging into what one church historian, George Marsden of Calvin College, calls "shallow folk religion." For others, the casualty is religion. It is difficult to measure the effects on religion as such. Thirty years ago, the United States appeared to be witnessing the greatest surge of churchgoing in its history. In contrast to nations with an official state church, membership and church attendance were high. A record-level of 49 percent of the population attended weekly church services. By the mid-1980's, the level had dropped below 40 percent.

A group of Protestant and Catholic leaders recently hired George Gallup to repeat a survey conducted 10 years ago of those he describes as the "unchurched," namely persons who are neither members nor regular participants in services at some church or synagogue. The findings are not encouraging for the health of organized religion. Some 78 million adults (44 percent of the U.S. population) said they did not regularly attend the church or synagogue, compared to 61 million (41 percent) 10 years ago. Their reasons were not lack of religious faith (88 percent said they prayed to God). The most common complaint was that churches spend too much time worrying about money, influence and organization. Others objected to too much dogma or the hierarchy telling people what to do or church teachings that were too narrow and too all intrusive. A recent news article was entitled: "Many Shun Church for Other Acts of Faith." A growing number turned from religion to secular activities which they found spiritually more fulfilling.

Most would agree that the data is not conclusive on the effects on religion of political activism of certain religious sects. The place of religion in the public square and its concern for human life rooted in the Bible deserves a hearing no less than the Humanist Manifesto. Yet its guidelines for politics are unclear. Columnist Bandow concludes: "But while the Bible—the most important sacred text in a nation where Christianity is the predominant religion—tells us a lot about right and wrong in dealing with God and our

neighbors, it says much less about the role of the state.”<sup>12</sup> Ancient Israel as a covenant nation bears little resemblance to today’s secular political systems. No religion offers a laundry list of divinely ordained public policies. The religious texts we revere were written in a time of sheep and shepherds.

Early in his career, Billy Graham rather incautiously proclaimed that if all men were Christians there would be no nuclear problem. Reinhold Niebuhr, who found the young Graham personally quite engaging, responded “not if we fail to develop a viable nuclear policy.” Bishop Tutu may be wiser than the young Graham when he repeatedly affirms: “I am a pastor, not a politician.” With the gravest political problems, the hope must still be that, when the moment for conflict resolution arrives, churchmen, and especially those who seek to convert politics into religion or religion into politics, will step aside and let the politicians do their work, as in the last two years of the Reagan administration.

#### CONCLUSION

Fortunately, democracies have been saved by the generous admixture of two traditions that enrich and strengthen one another. The one tradition is the Judeo-Christian tradition that provides the fundamental values on which a free society can be based. Religion permeates American government especially in the dignity it gives to the individual. The state exists for the individual, not the individual for the state, as in totalitarian societies. It is fair to ask if there would be any first ten amendments to the Constitution if there were no higher law on which the Constitution rested. As Edwin Corwin and others have demonstrated, the higher law is a political expression of the Judeo-Christian tradition. Justice or giving each person his or her due is a practice derived from broad concepts of equality that go back fundamentally to the idea that all men are equal in God’s sight. Values are part of the American political heritage but for their roots go back to the Judeo-Christian tradition. They stand apart from every notion of hierarchy and class structure that undertakes to freeze American society at some given point in time.

Counterpoised with this two-thousand-year-old tradition is the Greco-Roman tradition that bequeathed ideas of law and politics to American society. If the legacy of the Judeo-Christian tradition affords certain substantive propositions about man and the state,

Greco-Roman thought provides concepts regarding the legal and political process. If the former provides the moral and political underpinnings of our constitutional system, the latter teaches what is needed about the functioning of the legal and political system. Law gives the order and predictability which holds society together. It protects society against the centrifugal pressures of influence by too many single-interest groups. What united Rome and preserved Roman civilization was Roman law and the confidence every Roman felt in being a Roman citizen (*civis Romanus sum*). The Greek tradition of politics assured respect for the political experience—men attained self-fulfillment through participation in political life in the polity—and a sense that politics was not religion or philosophy but sometimes “an order of brigands and robbers.” The Aristotelian study of political systems provided distinctions between the absolutely best, best under given circumstances and corrupted political systems.

The dual legacy of Judeo-Christian and Greco-Roman thought assured that two strains of thinking would be interconnected with each other present in the American political system. The two protected the colonies and ultimately the Union from both utopianism and cynicism. Because the Judeo-Christian tradition put the individual at the center of the political universe sanctified by a relationship with God, no tyrant's strategy could be defended if it sacrificed the rights of individuals to some collective or ideological goal. This tradition safeguarded against cynicism. From the Greeks, Americans learned that politics, while worthy of respect, was neither the highest nor the lowest form of experience. It took on a certain moral dignity, however, because men could learn virtue through politics. It was a realm of trial and error, of light and shadows, of shades of grays rather than of unquestioned right or wrong. Above all, politics was essential in the City of Man, even as religion was the foundation of the City of God. Seemingly, present day political and religious figures have forgotten or never knew these ancient truths. They seem oblivious to their meaning when they seek the religious transformation of politics or the political transformation of religion. Their mission is hardly designed to bring health to the relationship between religion and politics.

## NOTES

1. “Brandeis dissenting, in *Myers v. United States*,” 272 U.S. 52, 293.
2. *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, ed. Roy P. Basler (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1959), 4: 240.



3. John de Crevecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer* (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1912), pp. 39–41.
4. Herbert Butterfield, *Religion and Politics*, unpublished paper, p. 3.
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
10. Kenneth A. Briggs, *New York Times*, 9 September 1984.
11. *Washington Post*, 3 August 1988, p. A17.
12. *Ibid.*